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PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLH RUEHLN
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DE RUEHAA #0239 0491303

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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2333

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 4848

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2621

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2486

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3092

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3336

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000239

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, INL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV KCRM SOCI TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: PUBLIC BUSES IN MARY AWAIT PRESIDENTIAL
BLESSING

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public internet.

¶2. (U) SUMMARY: Two hundred brand-new Russian buses sit parked in a Ministry of Transportation parking lot in Mary Province awaiting President Berdimuhamedov's official "inauguration" before they can be put into service. The President has not yet scheduled his next visit to the province. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance's provincial branch in Mary is already charging the Ministry of Transport for the revenues that the buses should have been collecting. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (U) Last August, the Ministry of Transportation signed a contract for the purchase of one thousand Russian PAZ buses, spare parts and lubricants. President Berdimuhamedov, aiming to "improve passenger transportation in rural areas and enhance the quality of service offered to citizens," personally signed a decree authorizing the purchase. The buses, a two-door version of the PAZ-32053 series widely used on city and municipal roads in Russia, are produced by the Pavlovsk Bus Plant.

¶4. (SBU) The buses were evenly distributed among the five provinces of Turkmenistan five months ago. Local authorities in Mary immediately hired additional personnel, including drivers and mechanics, all of whom have yet to start working. A senior Ministry of Finance specialist in Mary told one of our local staff that on January 1 the Ministry of Finance began charging the Ministry of Transportation for the revenues that the buses were supposed to be collecting. As a result, the Ministry of Transportation's budget for Mary is operating at a deficit, as they are being taxed for buses that are not even in operation.

¶5. (U) The Ministry of Health in Mary is reportedly in a similar situation after purchasing 50 Mercedes-Benz Sprinter ambulances in July of 2007 from the Spanish firm IPC Motors. The ambulances, delivered in October 2007, reportedly cost 46,500 euros each. A farmer from Murgap District in Mary Province, a relative of our LES, said that his son had been hired to drive one of the new ambulances, but has not been called to work yet. He was told that the local hospital must await the President's arrival and "blessing" before the ambulances are put into service.

¶6. (U) COMMENT: It is true that in Turkmenistan the President traditionally attends ribbon-cutting ceremonies for major national construction projects, and personally ratifies international contracts and treaties. In the case of these buses and ambulances, however, it is unclear whether local officials are actually required to await presidential "inauguration," or whether they are just afraid to proceed without it. END COMMENT.

MILES